**THE CHURCH**

Some simple statements about “The Church”

* “The Church is not a building.”

“The church is the people.”

(*But*, God’s people do gather in the building)

* “The church building is not a temple.”

The temple was a holy place set apart for worship, prayer, and God’s presence.

(*But*, the church building **is** a holy (set-apart) place where God’s people gather for worship, prayer, and experiencing God’s presence.)

When the word “church” comes up in conversation, the first thing we think of is a building. We have this mindset that church is the place we go to on Sundays or the building down the road. it’s easy to lose sight of the fact that we aren’t just *going to* church; we *are* the church.

The word “church” is usually taken from the Greek word “ecclesia” in Matt 16, which connotatively has been translated as “called out ones”, but denotatively is translated as “gathering” as it is used in Acts 19.

A *contextual definition* of the word “church” could be “*a gathering of people whom God has called out of the world unto himself”*.

In 1 Timothy 5:16-17, Paul describes the church as a group of people dedicated to doing whatever it takes to reach out and help others. We have a responsibility to serve and help others in need as the church. Caring for each other as well as those outside of the church is the quickest way to see Jesus change lives. Too often, we see a need and wait for the pastor or someone on staff to take responsibility. But that’s not the way church works.

Each of us has been given skills, abilities and opportunities to serve.

In the Bible, “church” is *always* a reference to people, not a place. The church is a body of believers that live out the Gospel in their words and actions.

North Shore Fellowship has five hallmarks to its vision; WORSHIP • TEACHING • FELLOWSHIP • OUTREACH • PRAYER

All of these can take place in the church building, (except Outreach, which usually takes place outside the church building). In fact this facility exists to “facilitate” these five purposes. When it is used in keeping with the vision, it will accomplish one or more of these objectives.

*“The church building is not a temple.”*

The temple was a holy place set apart for worship, prayer, and experiencing God’s presence.

(**But** the “church building” **is** a holy (set-apart) place where God’s people gather for worship, prayer, and experiencing God’s presence.)

Our bodies are temples – of the Holy Spirit.

**1st Cor. 6:19** “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?”

In the Old testament, the Temple was modeled after the tabernacle with three distinct areas;

1. The Outer Court – Where animals were sacrificed and the brazen altar stood.
2. The Holy Place – The place where priest would present offerings to God. In it stood the Golden lampstand, the table of showbread, and he altar of incense.
3. The Holy of Holies – No entry except Yom Kippur. The place where the ark of the covenant dwelled.

Note the altars in the temple were meant to burn up offerings and incense. We do not have an altar in our church, just a platform and a podium, *(please don’t burn anything there.)*

Having said all that, there IS a lot we can learn from scripture as we read about the people of God gathering in a place or a building to worship and serve the Lord. And what should be the posture of our heart as we come together as His people in the place He has provided for us.

1. SOLOMON’S TEMPLE

The first example comes from the day that Solomon completed the Temple. He built it just as the Lord prescribed, appointed it with all the items and designated furnishings. He brought the ark of the covenant into the Holy of Holies.

Then they worshipped the Lord with music and singing;

2nd Chron 5:12-14 “All the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. **13**The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang: “He is good; his love endures forever.”

*(Ho du l’Adonai Ki Tov, ki lei Olam chasdo)*

Then the temple of the Lord was filled with the cloud, **14**and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.”

Then Solomon prayed a long prayer of dedication to the Lord.

**2nd Chron 7:1** “When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.”

But later that night, after everything had quieted down, the Lord came to Solomon at night and offered him a warning, and some very important instructions;

**2nd Chron 7:11-16** ”When Solomon had finished the temple of the Lord and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the Lord and in his own palace, **12**the Lord appeared to him at night and said: “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. **13**“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, **14**if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. **15**Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. **16**I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.”

Things were going really well at the time. But the Lord warned that there will be times when things are not going to be so good. This is something we have to bear in mind today. Right now is one of the most joyful, happy and unified days of our church’s history. But there may be days when things are not going so great, and when that happens, there is a plan we must follow;

if my people, who are called by my name, will;

* humble themselves and
* pray and seek my face and
* turn from their wicked ways,

then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

1. THE SECOND TEMPLE

The next example comes during the time when God’s people returned from exile in Babylon after their temple was destroyed and they were taken captive for 70 years. While they were “hostages” they couldn’t worship at a temple or hear the word of the Lord read to them.

When they got back to Jerusalem and rebuilt the wall, that was the first thing they did.

**Neh. 8:8** They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read. 9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. 10 Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for *the joy of the Lord is your strength*.”

**Ezra 3:10-13** “When the builders completed the foundation of the Lord’s Temple, the priests put on their robes and took their places to blow their trumpets. “And the Levites, descendants of Asaph, clashed their cymbals to praise the Lord, just as King David had prescribed. With praise and thanks, they sang this song to the Lord: ‘He is so good! His faithful love for Israel endures forever!’ “Then all the people gave a great shout, praising the Lord because the foundation of the Lord’s Temple had been laid.”

But there were those present among them who were not so happy. Some were actually weeping because the temple that was built was not as big and magnificent as Solomon’s temple that they remember.

**Haggai 2:1** on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai…

5…my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’ 6“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. 7I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty. 9‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty.”

If any of us are feeling that our joy is mixed with a bit of sadness because this small upper room auditorium may not be as big and impressive as church buildings we left behind. *(This is the smallest new church building I have ever opened, but definitely the coolest!)*

Hear the word of the Lord that we just read; *“I will fill this house with glory,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the Lord Almighty.” (Let’s believe and receive that for us!)*

1. THE UPPER ROOM

After Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles and others gathered in an upper room continuing in prayer and supplication as they awaited Pentecost. We don’t know exactly where the Holy Spirit fell upon them in Acts 2, it was likely in the area of the temple where Shavuot was taking place, however their gathering place, and base of operations during this time was “the Upper Room”.

**Acts 1:12-14** **“**Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. **13**And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James. **14**These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”

They gathered in an “Upper Room” continuing in unity and prayer.

**Acts 2:1-4 “**When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. **2**And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3**Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. **4**And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

This happened in a house, possibly still the Upper Room house, but go the attention of all who were dwelling in Jerusalem.

**Acts 2:14-17“**But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. **15**For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is *only* the third hour of the day. **16**But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

**17**‘”And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.”

Peter preached to these thousands of Orthodox Jews who were gathered in Jerusalem for Shavuot (Pentecost), and the spirit moved in power within his words.

**Acts 2:40-41“**And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” **41**Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them!”*

Now they are a mega-church, when a minute ago they were a church of about 120, meeting in an Upper Room!

So what did they do???

**ACTS 2:42“**All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.”

These four things were the hall marks of the early church;

Teaching, Fellowship, Sharing meals, and praying together.

They continued to gather, but not necessarily in a church building, they gathered in the temple AND in homes, and very likely in that Upper Room that was able to accommodate at least 120 people, but they did it in “one accord” (unity), with gladness and simplicity of heart.

**ACTS 2:46-47“**So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, **47**praising God and having favor with all the people. *And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved*!”

This is my prayer for our church.

Not only that the Lord would add to our church daily those who are being saved, but that we would devote ourselves to Teaching, Fellowship, Sharing meals, and praying together.

That we would remain in “one accord”, meaning *unshakeable unity* when the enemy tries so hard to divide us.

That we would serve one another with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And that when tough times come, we would, humble ourselves and pray and seek His face, and turn from our wicked ways,

And most of all that we would dedicate this place as *Holy to the Lord*, “set apart” for His purposes, His ministry, His will, for His honor, and His glory alone.

I believe that if we do all that, He will

* Hear from heaven, forgive our sin, and will heal our land
* Fill this house with glory,
* *Add to the church daily those who are being saved*!”